

Planning Collaboration Initiative Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration

Conference Call Summary for April 1, 2003

Topic: Corridor Studies/ Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding

The first round of conference calls for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Planning Collaboration Initiative (PCI) continued on April 1, 2003 with a discussion of Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding. This was the sixth of eight (recently reduced from 15) conference calls to discuss the drafting of a National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between FHWA and FTA. Robin Mayhew of FHWA Headquarters and Vince Valdes of FTA Headquarters facilitated the discussion. Other members of the PCI Team who participated in the conference call included Jesse Balleza from FTA Region 6. Other participants from FHWA Headquarters included Terry Rosapep from FTA Headquarters. Volpe Center staff participation included Jeff Bryan, Cassandra Callaway Allwell, Kate Fichter, and Esther Lee.

Representatives from the following field offices participated in this call:

- FTA Region 1
- FTA Region 6
- FTA Region 7
- FTA Region 8
- FTA Region 9
- FHWA California Division
- FHWA Georgia Division
- FHWA Indiana Division
- FHWA North Dakota Division
- FHWA Oklahoma Division
- FHWA Texas Division

This summary provides (1) a description of issues and regional differences in coordinating Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding, (2) a summary of recommendations for improved collaboration, and (3) a suggested issue to be addressed in future PCI conversations that was not immediately relevant to the discussion on Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding (*see Parking Lot/Bus Stop Issues*).

OVERALL COMMENTS ABOUT THE PCI

During the conference call, participants asked the following questions about the PCI:

- One participant asked if there was a target date for the finished product, and if a presentation would be made at the Planners' Meeting. The PCI team responded that a draft MOU would be complete by mid to late May. Additionally, plans are being made to present comments on the draft MOU at the August Planners' Conference.

- One participant expressed concern over citing examples in the MOU as recommended practices due to the variety of staffing resources and workloads across the nation. In response, the PCI team assured him that a variety of practices would be noted to account for the diverse conditions of local offices.
- One participant asked for more details on the pilot projects of Phase Two. The PCI team responded that pilot projects would highlight innovative practices, such as cross-training FTA and FHWA planners, co-locating FHWA division and FTA regional personnel, and designating multi-modal planners. The following regions described their successful experiences:
 - Region 7 cited their successful cross-training experience with a staff member from the FHWA PDP program.
 - Region 3 cited their metropolitan office manager, who had previously worked at a FHWA division, as a positive example of a multi-modal planner.

DISCUSSION OF CORRIDOR STUDIES/ALTERNATIVES ANALYSES AND FLEX FUNDING

The conference call participants discussed the process of coordinating between agencies on Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding issues. Participants raised the following two issues:

- A. Staff Resources
- B. Information Sharing

A. Staff Resources

Participants stated that limited resources constrain the level of FHWA and FTA joint participation on each Corridor Study/Alternatives Analysis. Given the sheer volume of studies and analyses occurring, participants agreed that selective joint involvement and division of labor is often the best use of time and resources. As a result, FTA continues to be more involved with transit components while FHWA is more involved with highway components of multi-modal projects. Differences in the Corridor Study/Alternatives Analysis process between FHWA and FTA also limit expedient coordination. One participant pointed out that the FTA New Starts process requires additional design review and approval steps that FHWA does not.

Examples of the various types of agency involvement and coordination in Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses include:

1. In Region 6, a MOU states that planners will consult with each other and decide jointly on the type of participation each agency will have. For example, the New Orleans Downtown-Airport Corridor Study analyzed highway and transit components. The FHWA Division Office and FTA Regional office participated in a joint scoping process, but wrote separate EIS's in order to adhere to the schedule of each project.
2. In Texas, the FHWA Division Office and FTA Regional Office may write separate environmental documents on the Corridor Study depending on the outcome of the ongoing study. For example, two separate environmental documents were written for the Houston North Freeway Corridor Study,

which investigated highway and transit alternatives. In the past, MPOs and TXDOT created multidisciplinary teams to perform the corridor studies. Because the number of studies became great, the FHWA Division Office prioritizes major projects that have the greatest impact and require coordination between resource agencies, or where no transit alternatives exist.

3. In California, no formalized MOU exists, although MPOs invite both FHWA and FTA to study meetings. Both agencies generally participate in the overall process, but agency representatives are not able to attend all the meetings.
4. In Colorado, a MOU exists but has not been implemented. The MOU was created in preparation for the NEPA process on the East Corridor project.
5. In Indiana, the Rapid Transit Study involves FHWA and the Greenfield District (which, traditionally takes care of roads) in addition to FTA. Joint cooperation for this transit project EIS resulted, in part, from increased multi-modal support from the previous Northeast Corridor study.
6. In Georgia, a HOV – BRT study began without any coordination. Eventually, agencies attempted to coordinate more effectively through joint meetings. Although the process is far from perfect, different agencies are, at least, “at the table.”

No recommendations were made to the PCI Team for drafting the National MOU.

B. Information Sharing

Participants stated that the level of information sharing between FHWA and FTA when performing a Corridor Study/Alternatives Analysis varies. One participant stated that although the FTA regional office usually receives information on Corridor Studies, on occasion, FTA has been notified of results for a Corridor Study that they had previously not known was occurring. Another participant expressed the desire for more transit-sensitive understanding in multi-modal projects (e.g., transit needs of a HOV lane in a Bus Rapid Transit [BRT] project differ from highway needs).

Examples of information sharing and agency involvement in coordinating information on Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses include:

1. In Colorado, Denver DOT, Regional Transportation District, MPOs and other representatives from the largest cities convene monthly meetings to review each of the Corridors’ Optimization Studies or other NEPA-related corridor issues (i.e., 10-15 summaries).
2. In Region 1, most of the states, MPOs and FHWA divisions include FTA regional offices on mailings for major projects.

The following recommendations on improving information sharing for Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses were made to the PCI Team for consideration in drafting the National MOU:

- Convene monthly interagency meetings to review all current corridor studies and projects.

- Include representatives from FTA and FHWA on mailings for major projects.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The following list restates the recommendations on the topic of Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding offered for consideration in the development of a National MOU:

- Convene monthly interagency meetings to review all current corridor studies and projects.
- Include representatives from FTA and FHWA on mailings for major projects.

PARKING LOT/ BUS STOP ISSUES

The following issue arose during the conference call, but was not immediately relevant to the discussion of Corridor Studies/Alternatives Analyses and Flex Funding:

- Many FTA New Starts grantees feel that they are held to a different standard than highway projects. It was noted that if Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) money was granted for a highway project, however, there is little difference between the FHWA and FTA process.